

VZCZCXRO1627
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHTV #0042/01 0071817
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 071817Z JAN 09
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9916
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 7912

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 000042

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/07/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [EG](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA SITUATION REPORT, JANUARY 7, 1900

Classified By: DCM Luis G. Moreno. Reason 1.4 (B/D)

11. (C) Summary: IDF operations were suspended from 1300 to 1600 local to allow Gaza residents to collect food, water, and other humanitarian supplies; pauses are likely to continue at least every other day. A spokesman for PM Olmert "welcomed" Egyptian President Mubarak's truce proposal and announced plans to dispatch a delegation to Cairo to continue discussions on halting terrorist actions from Gaza and the smuggling of war materiel into the Gaza Strip. Senior GOI officials have been careful to clarify that the Israeli position does not connote acceptance of a cease-fire - despite French President Sarkozy's announcement to that effect IDF air and ground operations continued on January 6 and 7, with the January 6 IDF shelling of an UNRWA school and resulting death of at least 30 civilians dominating local headlines. The Israeli MFA has launched a PR effort to highlight unlawful methods of war employed by Hamas, but their spokesman have had to contend with a barrage of criticism, including from a UN spokesman who challenged the Israeli assertion that militants had fired weapons from UN premises. Hostilities continued following the end of the 1700 pause, and the Israeli security cabinet reportedly agreed to continue IDF operations in Gaza while deferring a decision to expand the operation, a move that IDF sources anticipate would require adding 57,000 soldiers to the 10,000-15,000 currently engaged in and around the Gaza Strip.
End Summary.

Efforts to improve humanitarian assistance

12. (SBU) On January 7 the Israeli government announced that IDF operations would be suspended for several hours daily, beginning with a three-hour pause from 1300-1600 local on January 7, to allow Gaza residents time to collect food, water, and other supplies, and to seek medical attention, adding that IDF operations would resume immediately in the event of impending rocket launches by Gaza-based militants. While not explicitly referenced in the Israeli announcement, the pauses were likely instituted in response to worsening humanitarian conditions inside Gaza as well as international outcry over the January 6 IDF shelling of the al-Fakhura UNRWA school in the Jabaliya refugee in which at least 30 civilians were killed and 55 wounded. UNRWA reported 16,660 internally-displaced Palestinians taking shelter in 27 UNRWA emergency shelters. Hostilities resumed immediately after 1700 local, particularly in and around Jabaliya. The UN reports over 640 dead and an estimated 2,800 injured Palestinians as of January 6. Foreign missions have informed us that as many as 500 foreigners (or dual nationals) are seeking evacuation, and ICRC will attempt to evacuate as many as possible on January 8, provided the military situation allows a window.

13. (SBU) On January 7, 78 trucks of food, medical, and other humanitarian supplies entered Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing, along with 120,000 liters of fuel oil for the Gaza power station. (Fuel shipments over the past two days

totalled 600,000 liters.) The Nahal Oz fuel pipeline was also open on January 7, though the Karni grain conveyor remained closed. Humanitarian and UN organizations report full cooperation from Israeli authorities in transporting supplies into Gaza, but note that distribution to residents is increasingly complicated by ongoing IDF combat operations. MFA officials told poloff January 7 that Israel has surveillance of Hamas militants intercepting relief vehicles, but he complained that international media are not interested.

¶4. (SBU) In an effort to improve assistance delivery to Gaza residents, Israel opened a "Joint Coordination Room" in Ramat Aviv outside Tel Aviv to include, inter alia, representatives from humanitarian NGOs, Israel's Office of the Coordinator for Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), and the IDF. This cell would complement the COGAT coordination center in Erez, but would not appear to meet fully the request of NGOs such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) for real-time coordination with the IDF Southern Command. (Septel will cover this development in greater detail.)

Diplomatic Developments

¶5. (SBU) Meanwhile, the security cabinet including PM Olmert, DM Barak, FM Livni convened January 7 with Chief of IDF General Staff Ashkenazi and Shin Bet head Diskin, for an update on ground operations in Gaza and to discuss various diplomatic options, with attention centered on a proposal announced by President Mubarak in Cairo on January 6 for an

TEL AVIV 00000042 002 OF 003

immediate cessation of hostilities to be followed by talks in Cairo between Israel and "Palestinian representatives." (Note: The proposal has been variously portrayed as an American-Egyptian or French-Egyptian effort with occasional mention of Turkish or Syrian involvement.) The security cabinet reportedly deferred a decision on expanding ground operations in Gaza, including a shift of operational focus southward or incursions into built-up parts of Gaza City and Khan Younis yet to be entered by IDF troops. However, the security cabinet approved continuing current IDF operations in the Gaza Strip.

¶6. (U) Local and international press highlighted French President Sarkozy's 1500 local announcement that Israeli and Palestinian authorities had "accepted the Franco-Egyptian ceasefire proposal." In fact, Mark Regev, spokesman for PM Olmert, announced at 1600 local that Israel "welcomes the French-Egyptian initiative" and would dispatch a delegation to Cairo in the coming days to continue discussions. The Prime Minister's office also issued a press release that more clearly articulated the GOI perspective: "Israel is working to improve the security reality in the south of the country. Israel thanks Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and French President Nicholas Sarkozy for their efforts to advance a solution for halting terrorist actions from Gaza and the smuggling of war materiel into the Gaza Strip from Egypt. Israel views as positive the dialogue between Egyptian and Israeli officials in order to advance these issues."

¶7. (S) MFA Policy Advisor Tal Becker confirmed to us January 7 that Olmert had responded positively to Mubarak's proposal with a view to bringing an end to Hamas firing and smuggling. It is those aspects of the Egyptian proposal that Israel is willing to discuss. Becker emphasized that the PMO statement should not/not be construed as acceptance of the Egyptian proposal. Becker explained that the GOI does not like the term "cease-fire" as that connotes equivalence between the parties; the GOI wants an end to Hamas firing and smuggling so that Israel can be in a position to stop using force. GOI contacts have informed us that MOD's Amos Gilad and the PMO's Foreign Policy Advisor, Shalom Tourgeman, will be traveling to Cairo on January 8.

18. (C) On January 7 local news outlets gave prominent coverage to FM Livni's January 6 remarks that the conflict would not end with Israel "shaking hands with Hamas," widely interpreted as a rejection of a quick ceasefire, but noted by some as leaving room for a deal to be "imposed" without direct Hamas involvement. Referring to "private conversations" with MOD Barak, prominent commentators Nahum Barnea and Shimon Shiffer claimed in the January 7 edition of Yedioth Ahronoth that Barak favored an immediate ceasefire and regretted that PM Olmert had not accepted a French proposal for a 48-hour ceasefire before ground operations began on January 3. ECF sources confirmed that this account was accurate.

POLITICS

19. (C) PM Olmert's decision to allow FM Livni a prominent role in managing the Gaza war has led to Barak grumbling to the press that she should confine her activities to foreign affairs. Barak has stated that he has put his political campaign on hold during the war. Despite the calls of some smaller parties for a delay of the February 10 elections, it is unlikely that the major parties - Kadima, Likud or Labor - will accept a delay. (Note: In special circumstances, the Knesset can extend the election date, but such an extension requires a majority of 80 out of 120 Knesset members. This has occurred on just one occasion - following the outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.)

IDF operations continue

110. (C) IDF sources reported 40 targets hit by artillery or air strikes during the night of January 6/7, including tunnels along the Egypt-Gaza border. IDF ground operations continued the morning of January 7 near Gaza City, Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahiya, Khan Younis, and the Jabaliya refugee camp. One IDF soldier was killed in Gaza on January 6, bringing total IDF casualties since ground operations began on January 3 to five killed and 57 wounded. IDF troops remain staged around Gaza population centers, with no major incursions into dense urban areas yet reported. DAO sources reported that 10,000-15,000 IDF troops (primarily active duty units) are deployed in and around Gaza and estimated that an additional 57,000 troops (primarily reservists) would be required for a "third phase" of operations in southern Gaza and inside major population centers.

TEL AVIV 00000042 003 OF 003

111. (SBU) IDF sources report at least 20 rockets and mortars fired into Israel from Gaza on January 7, including four Grad-type rockets fired toward Be'er Sheva and Netivot, with two Israeli civilians suffering light injuries.

PUBLIC DEBATE

112. (SBU) Meanwhile, public criticism of the Gaza campaign has increased, with slightly more than half of local op-ed contributors now calling for an immediate ceasefire. In a Yedioth Ahronoth op-ed on January 6, Professor Oren Barak of Hebrew University argued that by pulverizing state institutions in places like Gaza and Lebanon, Israel is undermining its long-term security by preventing the emergence of structural alternatives to militant-dominated weak or failed states. Poloff attended a roundtable on the Gaza campaign for foreign diplomats sponsored by the Herzliya Interdisciplinary Center's Institute for Counter Terrorism (IDC-ICT) in which IDF COL (ret.) Jonathan Fighel argued that Hamas remains highly motivated despite IDF ground operations, criticized Israel for failing to define "victory," and

concluded that international diplomatic pressure would bring hostilities to an end in seven-to-ten days. Taking a different tack in an Israel Hayom op-ed, right-wing retired MG Yaakov Amidror criticized the GOI's strategy of "turning the screw" on Gaza rather than taking decisive action. He posits that the IDF should be given the task of occupying the Gaza Strip - only then will Hamas understand that it may lose everything and agree to Israeli terms. Dr. Dore Gold, a Netanyahu advisor, told an emboff January 7 that the Egyptians and Israelis have a convergence of interests on Gaza; Gold asserted that Egypt is telling Israel to "do a good job, finish it off." In a recent op-ed, Gold has also questioned the reliability of European monitors.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

CUNNINGHAM